Mixed Bag

BY JIM RIKHOFF

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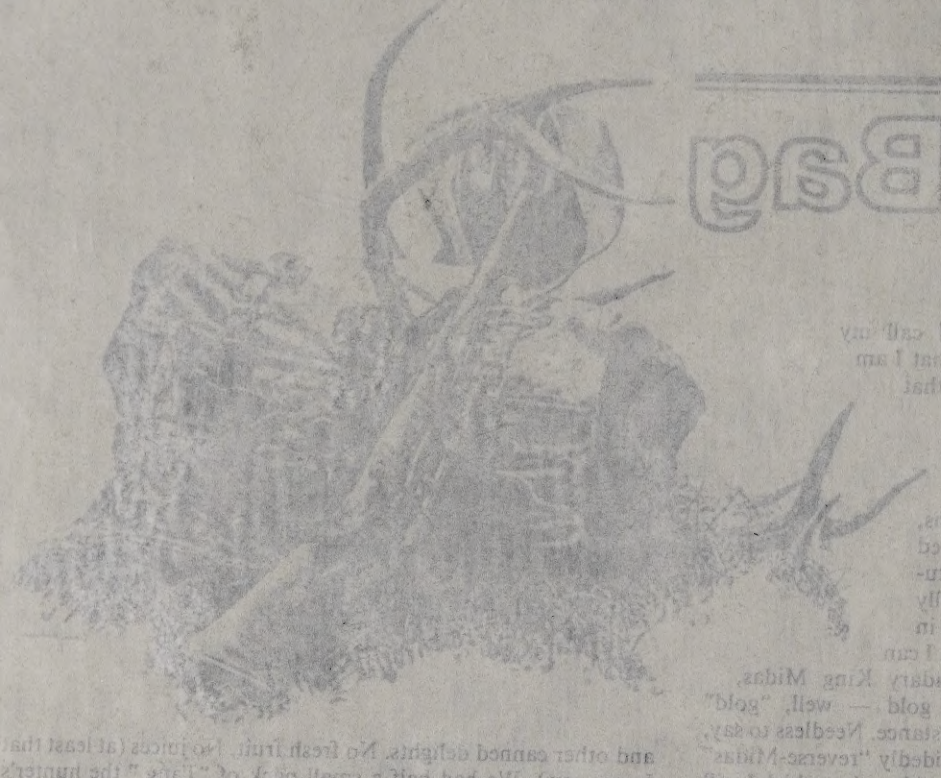

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To complement the stock, a birdseye maple buttplate and grip cap were fitted directly to the stock. The fore-end was left without any contrasting tip. The buttplate will be checkered with the rest of the stock.

After final sanding, the stock was given several coats of walnut stain to bring the color to a black walnut shade. After the stain, filler and finish completed the project. One of the nice aspects of this maple is that there are very few pores in the wood, so it takes very little filler compared to walnut with which I've worked.

The final metal process was the bluing. Roy applied a rust blue which results in a low-luster non-reflective satin blue both beautiful and practical for hunting. The bolt handle and extractor were both blued to eliminate as much glare as possible. With the vintage K3 Weaver mounted on two-piece low-based Buehler rings, the rifle weighs about 6¾ lbs. The only job left is the checkering.

The gophers were the first targets for the little .257. I load 100-gr. bullets with a light charge of Unique powder for a low-velocity, low-noise load for use on the backyard critters. Delores has had the chance to shoot the rifle and get used to its safety, trigger, bolt throw and handling characteristics. This knowledge is the most important aspect of good shooting in a potential hunting situation come deer season. Already the local gopher population has started to dwindle.

Delores is adapting quickly to her new rifle. Come Nov. 15 in Northern Michigan, the little .257 Roberts rifle will be loaded with 100-gr. spitzers.

All in all, it has been an educational and fun-filled project. The rifle fits Delores to perfection and the first group showed that it shoots well, too. There is pride in owning a rifle built just for her. ■

Mixed Bag

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coming up again as we returned to camp some miles away.

Fortunately, the rain dribbled away by dawn and the early morning fog soon followed, so, bolstered by hope and stiffened with determination to make this last day pay off, we set out again in two different parties. My guide and I headed back to the big mountain where we had hunted the previous day. We felt the big sheep and his companion rams just *had* to be somewhere around what was in our estimation the best sheep mountain in the range. Well, we were wrong, but as we sat on the top, glassing the surrounding countryside in futile hope of picking out our phantom adversaries, we heard a distant shot.

We waited, not saying a word, but looking at each other with grins and crossed fingers. If there wasn't another shot, Jimmy probably had a sheep down. If there was another shot, we most likely had trouble. Our smiles faded as another shot rang out — and then another — and another — and, well, a few more. My heart sank. It could be a series of misses, or worse, a wounded sheep that wasn't hurt enough to lay down and was going over the mountain. After awhile, we decided we had best head down and find their horses. If they had a wounded sheep, they might need help finding it; if they had a dead one, we could help them pack it out so we wouldn't have to come back the next day, which was the time we were slated to break camp anyway. Two hours later, we reached their horses just as we saw two tired and dejected figures coming down off one of the steepest, most undesirable mountain faces I've ever seen. There were no sheep horns peeking out over anyone's pack.

They had spotted their sheep but had a difficult approach so that Jimmy's first shot was a bit too much for a fledgling mountain hunter. He had missed, tried again several times, but the bullet was hitting low, even though he was holding quite a bit over the sheep's shoulders. (He had fallen on his rifle on his first stalk and badly jarred the scope and banged up the stock, but we had checked the rifle and made some corrections after shooting a target to check the zero.) In any event, he didn't hit the ram. That gentleman took off for safer horizons and our boys followed over country I would have given a second thought about before trying. They got a couple of more shots, but to no avail, and hours later, after a particularly dangerous descent over loose shale, finally made it down to the horses.

Jimmy was tired and disappointed but strangely satisfied. He hates heights, but he had "climbed the mountain." He hadn't gotten his sheep, but he had made his first stalk and taken his first shot, and most importantly, he had been to the top of the mountain and seen what was on the other side, stretching for miles in all directions. Nobody could take that away from him. Maybe no one should get his first sheep too easily.

While we were heading home — with the usual airline reservation trouble inherent in that trip — he told me it had been a great experience and he'd like to go back, maybe this time for moose or caribou. I thought about that awhile, still somewhat discouraged by the whole trip, when I remembered something he had said to me when he had returned to our tent exhausted after his first stalk. I won't repeat it here as it was private and it would embarrass him. Let me merely say that, in retrospect, it made that trip an unique experience for me too. As the man says, every cloud has its silver lining. That trip wasn't so bad after all. ■

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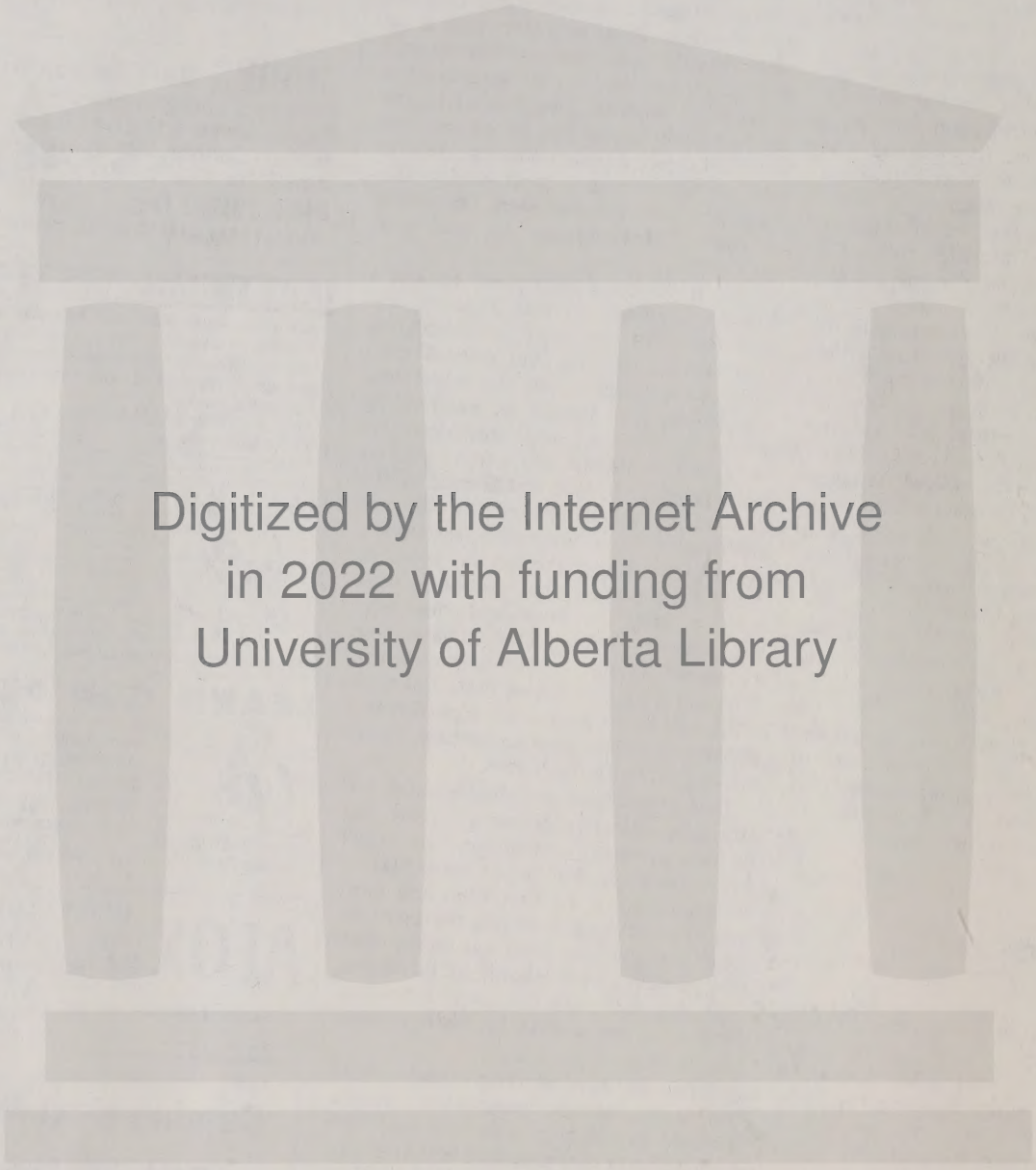

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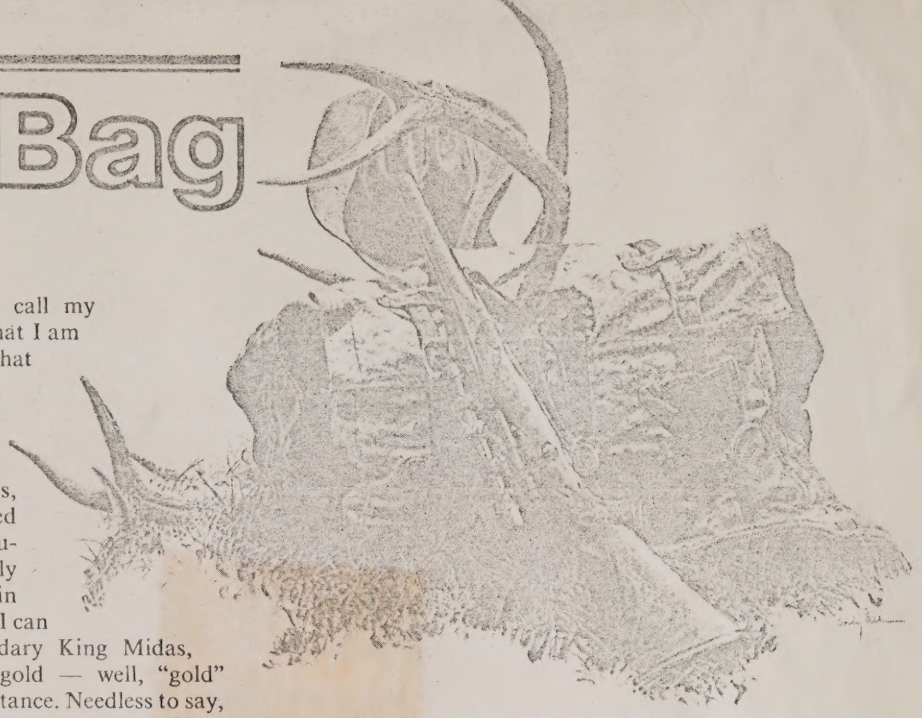

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